

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00
ICAE-00 INRE-00 TRSE-00 OMB-01 ACDA-12 SAA-01
SES-02 NEAE-00 IO-13 HA-05 PPT-01 CA-01 AID-05
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O P 311328Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8987
INFO SIT-REP COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
USNMR SHAPE BELGIUM
CINCUSNAVEUR, LONDON ENG
CINCUSAFE RAMSTEIN AB GER
COMSIXTHFLT
CTF SIX ZERO
CTF SIX ONE
CTF SIX TWO
CTG SIX ZERO PT TWO
FICEURLANT NORFOLK VA
FOSIF ROTA SPAIN
DIA WASHDC
CINCUSAREUR HEIDELBERG GER
USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES IT

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 4341

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, MILI, ASEC, LE
SUBJECT: LEBANESE SITUATION: JULY 31 - 1400 HOURS LOCAL

REF: BEIRUT 4305 (DTG 290950Z JUL 78)

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. A LEBANESE ARMY BATTALION LEFT FOR
SOUTH LEBANON. THE SITUATION IN BEIRUT IS RELATIVELY
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CALM, ALTHOUGH CHRISTIAN MILITIA FIRED RPG ROUNDS AT
THE PORT TO KEEP IT CLOSED. FATAH CLASHED WITH REJECTIONISTS
NEAR TRIPOLI. SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM IS DUE TO
VISIT BEIRUT. AS SAFIR SAID THAT A DIPLOMATIC CRISIS
HAD BEEN AVERTED WHEN KHADDAM "DENIED" HIS REPORTED
CRITICISM OF PRESIDENT SARKIS. MARONITE PATRIARCH
KHORAICHE WENT TO ROME. DESPITE PRESS ALLEGATIONS

OF PANIC CAUSED BY THE US TRAVEL ADVISORY, THE POUND REMAINS FIRM, AND INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS CONTINUE TO LEAVE BEIRUT 40 PERCENT EMPTY. END SUMMARY.

2. LEBANESE ARMY LEAVES FOR THE SOUTH.

A. ACCORDING TO PRESS AND DATT SOURCES, MORNING OF JULY 31 A BATTALION OF LEBANESE SOLDIERS, COMPOSED OF 400 TO 500 MEN, EIGHT ARMORED CARS, TEN APC'S AND FOUR 122 MM ARTILLERY PIECES LEFT ABLAH IN THE BIQA FOR TIBNIN, A MUSLIM TOWN IN SOUTH LEBANON, 120 KMS AWAY. (NOTE: L'ORIENT-LE JOUR REPORT IN JULY 30 SITREP THAT A BATTALION HAD ALREADY REACHED JAZZIN WAS INCORRECT.)

B. AS SAFIR WROTE THAT "IF ALL GOES WELL, THE ENTIRE LEBANESE QUESTION WITH ITS COMPLICATIONS WILL HAVE ENTERED ITS FINAL PHASE. OTHERWISE, THE COMING DAYS WILL BE THE BLACKEST YET." AN NAHAR REPORTED THAT THE MOVE WOULD PUT ALL FACTIONS TO THE TEST: THE SYRIANS, WHO PROMISED TO SECURE THE ROUTES FOR THE TROOPS, THE PALESTINIANS WHO PROMISED TO COOPERATE, AND THE RIGHTISTS WHO TALK ABOUT SUPPORTING THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITIES OF PRESIDENT ELIAS SARKIS.

3. GENERAL SECURITY SITUATION.

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A. THE NIGHT OF JULY 30/31 WAS RELATIVELY CALM, ALTHOUGH SMALL ARMS FIRE AND EXPLOSIONS WERE HEARD IN THE AYN AR-RUMMANEH AREA.

B. AT ABOUT 11:30 HOURS ON JULY 30, FIREFIGHT BROKE OUT BETWEEN CHRISTIAN MILITIA AND SYRIAN SOLDIERS NEAR THE QARANTINA BRIDGE AT THE EASTERN ENTRANCE TO BEIRUT. THE PHALANGIST VOICE OF LEBANON SAID THAT TWO CIVILIANS WERE KILLED AND 20 WOUNDED. THE VOICE OF LEBANON CLAIMED THAT THE FIRING HAD STARTED WHEN A SYRIAN ARMORED VEHICLE OPENED FIRE ON NEARBY HOUSES WHILE CROSSING THE BRIDGE. ACCORDING TO THE ADF, HOWEVER, THE FIGHTING BEGAN WHEN CHRISTIAN MILITIA OPENED UP ON TWO SYRIAN TRACTORS BRINGING SUPPLIES TO A SYRIAN UNIT IN THE AREA. DESPITE THIS INCIDENT, THERE IS STILL SOME TRAFFIC BETWEEN EAST AND WEST BEIRUT AT THE MUSEUM CROSSING. (NOTE: EMBASSY SOURCES REPORT IN JULY 30 SITREP OF TWO PEOPLE KILLED AT MUSEUM CROSSING WAS APPARENTLY REFERENCE TO QARANTINA BRIDGE INCIDENT.)

C. AN ADF COMMUNIQUE SAID THAT CHRISTIAN MILITIA ON JULY 29 "FOR THE FIRST TIME" USED A NEW ROCKET

DURING THE FIGHTING IN AYN AR-RUMMANEH ON JULY 29.
(THERE HAD BEEN EARLIER REPORTS IN THE BEIRUT PRESS
THAT THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS HAD OBTAINED FRENCH-MADE
SS-11 WIRE-GUIDED MISSILES). MARINE GUARDS AT YARZE
ON JULY 29 REPORTED THAT THE MILITIAS WERE USING A
NEW TYPE OF ROCKET WHICH EXPLODED IN AIR BEFORE IMPACT.
(THE SS-11 IS AN ARMOR-PIERCING ROCKET WHICH
DOES NOT EXPLODE BEFORE IMPACT.)

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4. PORT STILL CLOSED.

ACCORDING TO RADIO LEBANON, AN ATTEMPT TO REOPEN BEIRUT
PORT TODAY (JULY 31) FAILED WHEN SEVERAL SHELLS FELL INSIDE
THE PORT COMPOUND. (DATT SOURCES SAID THAT CHRISTIAN MILI-

TIAMEN FIRED THREE RPG ROUNDS TO ENSURE PORT REMAINED CLOSED.) THERE WERE NO CASUALTIES, BUT WORKERS WHO HAD ARRIVED TO RESUME ACTIVITY LEFT AND THE PORT WAS CLOSED
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AGAIN, THE RADIO SAID. (THE PORT HAS BEEN CLOSED EVER SINCE IT WAS SHELLED THE NIGHT OF JULY 2.) COMPANY COMMANDER OF LEBANESE ARMY UNITS INSIDE PORT TOLD DATT SOURCES THAT HIS MEN HAD ONLY ONE MAGAZINE WITH 25 ROUNDS EACH, AND THAT HE HAD REQUESTED HIS MEN BE WITHDRAWN BECAUSE HE FEARED ONE-SIDED FIGHT WITH MILITIA.

5. FATAH CLASHES WITH REJECTIONISTS.

FOUR PEOPLE WERE KILLED AND SEVERAL OTHERS WOUNDED AT AL BADAWI PALESTINIAN CAMP OUTSIDE TRIPOLI ON JULY 30, WHEN FATAH AND REJECTION FRONT FIGHTERS CLASHED, ACCORDING TO AN NAHAR. THIS WAS THE SECOND FIREFIGHT BETWEEN FATAH AND THE REJECTIONISTS THIS MONTH. THE FIRST TOOK PLACE IN THE TYRE AREA. IT INVOLVED MAINLY FATAH AND ABU ABBAS' PALESTINIAN LIBERATION FRONT (PLF) AND FOLLOWED THE PLF'S KIDNAPPING OF A NUMBER OF UN SOLDIERS.

6. KHADDAM AND SHIHABI VISIT TO BEIRUT.

SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER ABDUL HALIM KHADDAM AND SYRIAN CHIEF OF STAFF HIKMAT SHIHABI ARE SCHEDULED TO VISIT BEIRUT AUGUST 1, ACCORDING TO L'ORIENT LE JOUR. THEY WILL DISCUSS WAYS OF IMPROVING SYRIAN-LEBANESE RELATIONS AND OF WORKING OUT A SECURITY PLAN THAT WILL REDUCE LIKELIHOOD OF FUTURE FRICTION, THE PAPER SAID.

7. KHADDAM'S REMARKS ON SARKIS.

A. LEFTIST AS SAFIR COMMENTED ON JULY 31 THAT A DIPLOMATIC CRISIS BETWEEN BEIRUT AND DAMASCUS HAD BEEN AVOIDED WHEN SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM DENIED REMARKS ATTRIBUTED TO HIM BY LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR. (LE NOUVEL OBSERVATEUR HAD
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QUOTED KHADDAM AS SAYING SARKIS, WHILE WISE AND CALM, WAS INEFFECTUAL. BEIRUT RADIO ON JULY 29 QUOTED KHADDAM AS "DENYING CATEGORICALLY" THIS STATEMENT.)

B. NO LEBANESE GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL HAS COMMENTED PUBLICLY ON KHADDAM'S REMARKS, ALTHOUGH THE PHALANGIST VOICE OF

LEBANON ON JULY 30 CITED A PALACE SOURCE AS "EXPRESSING SURPRISE." THE PHALANGIST RADIO THEN CARRIED A STATEMENT BY NLP LEADER CAMILLE CHAMOUN WHO SAID HE DID NOT BELIEVE KHADDAM'S DENIAL.

8. PATRIARCH IN ROME.

MARONITE PATRIARCH ANTONIOS KHORAICHE ARRIVED IN ROME JULY 21 ON THE FIRST LEG OF A EUROPEAN TOUR. AFP SAID THAT KHORAICHE TOLD THE VATICAN THERE HAD BEEN "CIVILIAN MASSACRES" AND THAT THE SITUATION WAS DETERIORATING DESPITE THE RELATIVE CALM OF THE PAST FEW DAYS.

9. REACTION TO U.S. TRAVEL ADVISORY.

ON JULY 31 NEITHER FRENCH, ENGLISH NOR ARABIC PRESS MENTIONED EMBASSY'S ADVICE THAT US CITIZENS LEAVE LEBANON IF THEY DID NOT HAVE FAMILY OR BUSINESS REASONS FOR STAYING. DESPITE PREVIOUS PRESS ALLEGATIONS OF PANIC RESULTING FROM THIS ADVICE, INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS CONTINUED TO LEAVE BEIRUT 40 PERCENT EMPTY JULY 29-30, ACCORDING TO AN MEA EXECUTIVE. IN ADDITION, THE POUND REMAINS FIRM AT LL 2.90 TO THE DOLLAR. PARKER

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